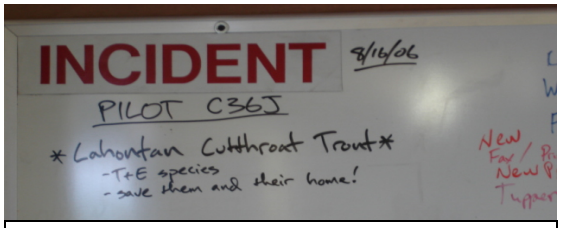
WILDFIRE HITS HABITAT OF THREATENED SPECIES
FIELD OFFFICE FACILITATES CONSENSUS ON DECISION MAKING

In August, 2006, a naturally occurring wildfire sparked more than flames when it burned in an area managed by the Salt Lake Field Office, BLM. The fire ignited concern and subsequent mobilization of experts over the crucial habitat for the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout the fire negatively affected.



Lahontan Cutthroat Trout
- *T&E Species*
- *Save them and their home!*

Realizing the personal, professional and emotional time investment of work to date to help save the Lahontan cutthroat, the Salt Lake Field Office, BLM called an emergency rehabilitation discussion before the fire was even contained. Different areas of expertise were invited to meet at the SLFO; those unable to make it were able to participate via a conference call. The goals of the emergency stabilization and rehabilitation meeting were to (1)identify and address concerns, (2)generate new alternatives, (3)combining elements of multiple alternatives and (4)checking that all participants understood the proposals.

BACKGROUND
IT'S ABOUT THE TROUT

The Lahontan cutthroat is named after the ancient Lahontan Lake of northern Nevada, eastern California and southern Oregon that receded nearly 12,000 years ago. When the Lahontan Lake dried up the trout were cut off from their original coastal territory. The landlocked fish began to adapt to their new habitat of interconnected lakes and rivers. Lahontan cutthroat now exist in about 10 percent of its historic stream habitat and only one percent of its past lake habitat from the early 1900s. (*The Magazine of the California Academy of Sciences, Betsy Mason, summer 2006*)

Before the fire. The Lahontan Cutthroat Project has been an evolving story of a group of private interests and agencies joining resources to protect the LCT habitat.

The Salt Lake Field Office BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Utah State Department of Natural Resources, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and local landowners have partnered on a cooperative agreement to maintain and enhance a captive, wildbrood stock of the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout(LCT) in northwestern Utah. Lahontan cutthroat trout were once widespread throughout the basins of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan, covering most of northern Nevada. Today, very pure strains of the LCT can be found in Utah BLM managed creeks and streams. The Lahontan Cutthroat Project

is an evolving story of a group of private interests and agencies joining resources to protect the LCT habitat.

Streams and Creeks found in northwestern Utah have been noted to mirror the original habitat of the Lahontan Cutthroat due to its salinity, temperature and rocky beds. During the spring spawn the collection of eggs from the brood stock and wildfish of the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Project help provide technical advice in monitoring efforts and fish populations. Benefits from the Lahontan Cutthroat Project have been realized in far reaching areas such as Pyramid Lake, Nevada, and Truckee, California.

ACTION

Multiple concerns and information were shared until the focus of the ESR group was clear.

Action was the point of the emergency rehabilitation and stabilization plan discussion. Assignment of actions, monitoring and follow-up was the key responsibility. To achieve consensus among the diverse group of technicians and specialists took trust. From the onset the meeting's guiding process was the short and long term health of the Lahontan cutthroat. The Salt Lake Field Office Manager served was understood as serving the group rather than acting as person-in-charge. Multiple concerns and information were shared on a chalk board until the focus of the group was clear, ideas and solutions were owned by the group. The facilitator helped identify areas of agreement and encouraged disagreement to be resolved by discussion. By the conclusion of the three hour meeting the group felt united in its responsibility for decisions.

FOLLOW-UP

A follow-up, at the site, on the ground field trip to the wildfire was scheduled within a few days of the meeting. Participants were awed at the terrain and the amount of devastation created by the wildfire. Photographs of the wildfire effects were offered during the initial meeting of the minds. However, the sense of responsibility seemed magnified when plan contributors went to the site. A 25% slope takes on an entirely different meaning when one is walking on it. Suddenly attendees understood what 75% burned land looks and feels like.

Perhaps U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist Paul Abate describes it best when he states, "It's like Mt. St. Helen's up there, I was walking in over 8" of ash, even the rock broke from the heat.

Water temperatures rose over 20 degrees from fire and loss of shade. The BLM and the Division of Natural Resources shocked and saved as many fish as they could.

John Dunn, bulldozer operator for the Salt Lake Field Office, BLM offers his opinion to the hydrologist, wildlife biologist and field office manager about the plausibility of navigating a dozer on the steep, rocky terrain affected by wildfire.

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